

Dreyse, Miriam, and Florian Malzacher, eds. *Rimini Protokoll. Experten des Alltags. Das Theater von Rimini Protokoll*. Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2009. 232 pp.

This is the first book on the German theater collective which has contributed highly innovative performances to various international festivals, two of which were in Athens (2008, 2009). In fact, there is probably no other theatrical invention from Germany that could claim to have had such an impact on current debates about representation on stage, theatricality and the modes of contemporary documentary theater.

Rimini Protokoll is a sort of label name for the works of Helgard Haug, Daniel Wetzel and Stefan Kaegi, which was created when their productions needed an identifiable name in the world of the theater. It is entirely fictitious and has resulted from the combination of a real place name and a category of text that suggests something far removed from the theater. Yet it signifies the principal idea that looms behind all their work: the desire to create theatrical shows based on documentary research with the help of people on stage who are not actors but “experts” in their respective professional fields; hence the term “Experten des Alltags” (experts from quotidian life) that worked well as a first name. Among the Rimini experts were a local politician and a Vietnam vet (in *Wallenstein*, 2005), a scholar of economics, a German businessman in China and the ghost-writer of a notorious criminal hedge-fund speculator (in *Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Erster Band*, 2006), and two Bulgarian truck drivers (in *Cargo Sofia*, 2006). They were all carefully chosen in an often complicated casting process and appeared with their likewise carefully developed real-life stories in a situation that is clearly recognized as theater. In traditional terms, one would say that Rimini Protokoll creates performances with “found” stories by found “actors” around a given subject. It strives thus to achieve authenticity instead of having actors acting out what somebody else wrote down for them in a rather anonymous relation to them. Therefore, one must not overlook how much of the actual artistic work of the Riminis and the resulting quality of their performances lies in the forming and staging of their expert material, in its dramaturgical analysis, and equally in its theatrical context.

Foregrounding these features of the Riminis’ performances was certainly the idea of the editors Miriam Dreyse and Florian Malzacher, who both have a background in scholarship and experimental theater. Composed like a casebook, their collection of essays contains fifteen articles on various aspects of the group, from its origins (at the renowned Institut für Angewandte

Theaterwissenschaften in Gießen and their first individual works thereafter) to the history of their theoretical framework. They are all written by experts that have accompanied the work of Rimini Protokoll over the years. Discussions of particular performances, such as Stefan Kaegi's *mnemopark* (described by the Austrian writer Kathrin Röggla), the transcontinental *Call Cutta* (greatly featured by sound-artist and composer Heiner Goebbels) and *Uraufführung: Der Besuch der alten Dame* (researching the world premiere of Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* in Zurich, as seen by Swiss critic Tobi Müller, 50 years later), all show how these projects evolved from an original idea to production and are not mere interpretations of individual works but rather make a point (or more) about the fundamental principles of the Riminis' theater.

The theoretical framework in the overview is provided by Hans-Thies Lehmann (on theory), Diedrich Diedrichsen (on the Rimini Protokoll's place between theater, performance and art) and Jens Roselt who deals with the issue of the actor/performer. More on the side of practical experience is the contribution by Eva Behrendt, who interviewed (and presented) some of the acting experts to register inside information about their participation in the Rimini productions, Marx's *Kapital* expert Thomas Kuczynski being perhaps the ideal example. That the Riminis, who have always also worked in solo or pairs within their three-party, brought their specific kind of art into new documentary and prizewinning radio plays is the subject of their audio dramatist Martina Müller-Wallraff. A complete listing of their not-so-well-known work for the radio, part of a large number of productions from 1995 to 2007, appears at the end of the book and contributes to the recognition of Rimini Protokoll as a continent of its own. Color picture plates with quotes from the Rimini experts complete the mapping of the theater collective and provide further inspiration.

This book on the system and practice of Rimini Protokoll will be indispensable to scholars and theater practitioners who want to know more about the work of these innovators that have shaken the theater scene. Its style reveals academic insights and theater experience that are given in a very accessible idiom and offer more when combined with information found at the multi-lingual website www.rimini-protokoll.de. The book is now available both in German and English.

Thomas Irmer
Germany